

Outside influence had kidnapped more prospective cowhands than all other evils combined. Of the lot, nothing can match the number of good boys who have been shanghaied by higher and lower education. Let an old kid get to hanging around school teachers too much, and the next thing you know he'll never use leather again except to patch the elbows of a sport coat.

My brother and sister used to help us at the ranch until they were exposed to college life. Once they found out the only way to get rich cowboying was to find a lost gold mine, they left town for jobs that pay less than six times as much as a top hand can draw.

Had they stayed away from educators and remained here at the ranch, they could have learned to live on a couple of hundred a month. And if they'd been patient, they could have eventually become ranchers and learned how to get by on a lot less than that. But oh no, they forsook a life that has inspired hundreds of writers and painters to burn up their pens and easels for an existence that doesn't have anything to offer but money and time.

Schooling is ruining everyone. Last week an unpapered alien walked up as we were leaving to go gather some cows. Without interview, I told him to catch an old bay horse that had been running out since last fall.

He examined the horse through the pipe rails of the corral. After he'd looked over the pony, he said that wasn't his brand of horseflesh. He said his kind were the ones who had sweat marks on their backs from having been ridden the day before.

So ended that prospect. I didn't need to hear any more to know the score. By dinner time he had a letter written to send to his homeland. Some school wrangler down in Mexico had cluttered his mind with words and numbers. If he'd been left out in the mountains to ride wild horses, he'd have crawled right in the middle of that bay horse. I was glad he left that night. People who have such good judgment don't fit in at a place that has to gather stock on horseback.

By fall, I guess the men walking through here will be quoting the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.'s actuary tables on ground versus aerial work. I don't really care because the ones who pass through here are only using the Shortgrass ranches for a preconditioning program to build their strength up for work on the farms up north. After we put about a 10 pound gain on them they disappear for the higher wages in the farming country. The cost of gain, needless to say, is hard to recover in a couple of weeks' work.

Molders of youth overlook the rich life that can be reached on the rangelands. Blabber-mouth commencement speakers supported by know-it-all career counselors never mention the satisfaction that man gets from taking a saddlehorn view of a herd of cattle while facing one of the invigorating northers that sweep across the Shortgrass prairies. City prejudiced teachers don't tell their students of the deep fulfillment a man experiences while trailing a herd of sheep on an August day as the sun's rays burst artistic cracks in the dry ground. All they ever teach kids is how to do something that will make a living. Cowboying or ranching, of course, would never come under that heading.

Educators aren't going to be content until the earth is covered by people too smart to risk their lives on horseback; they won't give up until there isn't a person left that can count stock through a gate without a slide rule. And while the ranks of riders grow thinner every year, school grounds, as you know, are overrun by students. Cowboying isn't a lost art. The problem is that there aren't many left to practice it.